Presbyterian Doctrines

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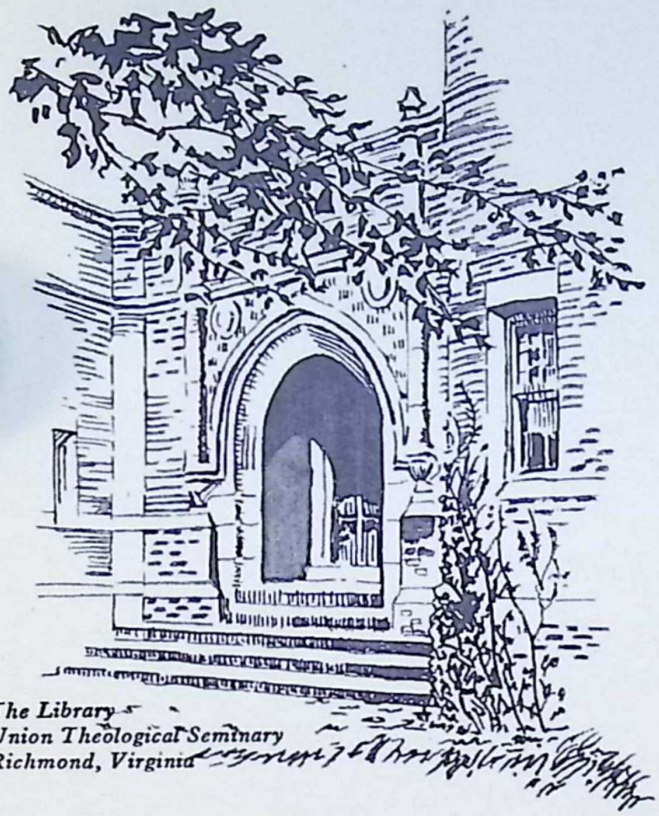

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Presbyterian Doctrines

G. B. STRICKLER, D. D.

PRESBYTERIANS have always attached great importance to doctrines. They have done this for two reasons:

One is, that the doctrines of religion are the facts of religion. What are the doctrines of religion? They relate to such subjects as the being and attributes of God; the relations in which He stands to men, and in which men stand to Him; to man's past history, present condition, and future destiny. These are some of the subjects to which the doctrines relate. And every true doctrine is only the assertion of a fact in regard to one or more of these subjects. It is a doctrine of religion that "God is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth." But that is, also, a fact. It is a doctrine of religion that man has fallen from the high estate in which he was created by sinning against God, and so has become, spiritually, totally depraved. But that, also, is a fact. It is a doctrine of religion that "there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved," except the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. But that, too, like the other doctrines just mentioned, is a fact. And the same is true of all the doctrines of religion. They are all facts; and thus they lie at the very foundation of religion. They make it possible, since they furnish the basis on which it rests. What sort of a religion would that be that was not grounded in, and built up on, well ascertained facts? One reason, then, why Presbyterians have always attached so much importance to the doctrines of religion is that they are the facts of religion.

For this reason, also, they have always insisted that doctrines should be preached. In many minds, indeed, there is much prejudice against such preaching. It is said that the doctrines are obscure; that some of them, indeed, are incomprehensible; that there is too much difference of opinion about them for them to be profitable themes of discussion; that the only result of such discussion is to confuse and bewilder the understanding, and to lead the attention away

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from the practical duties of life into a region of barren speculation. Besides, it is sometimes added, it does not make much difference what any one believes about the doctrines of religion, provided only he keeps close to the duties laid down in God's Word; and that, therefore, the kind of preaching to be preferred is that which is chiefly employed in pointing out those duties and in enforcing their discharge. But, since the doctrines of religion constitute its facts, how can it be intelligently and intelligibly preached, except as its doctrines are proclaimed? How can a science, or a philosophy be taught, except as its facts are taught? And so how can religion be preached except as its facts are made known?

The other reason why Presbyterians have always attached great importance to the preaching of doctrines is found in the relation that subsists between doctrines and duties. What is that relation? Plainly this: *the doctrines make the duties.* Why is it my duty to love God? In order to answer that question, must I not turn to certain doctrines of religion; and do I not say it is my duty to love Him because he made me and has preserved me, and because in Christ He offers to redeem me; because He has already, in the past, bestowed upon me many great temporal and spiritual mercies, and because He offers to bestow on me in the future blessings greater still? And do I not thus make the duty of loving Him depend upon a number of doctrines? And do not these doctrines *make* the duty of loving Him; and if it were not for these doctrines, and if these doctrines were not facts, would there rest upon me any obligation whatever to fix the supreme affections of my heart upon Him? Why is it my duty to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? In order to answer that question, must I not again go back to certain doctrines of religion, and do not I say it is my duty to believe on Him because I am a sinner, a great sinner, an inexcusable sinner, a condemned and lost sinner, because He is the Saviour of sinners; because He is able to save me and willing to save me; because he commands me to believe on Him; because only by believing on Him can I be brought into that state of mind and heart in which it will be possible for me to render to Him the love and service of which He is infinitely worthy? And do I not thus make this duty, also, depend on a number of doctrines; and do not these doctrines thus make the duty? And if it were not for these doctrines, and if these doctrines

were not also facts, would there be any reason whatever why I should give to Christ the supreme confidence of my soul? *Thus doctrines make the duties.* There is not a duty enforced in all God's Word that does not spring out of one or more doctrines there inculcated. This, then, is the other reason why our Church has always attached so much importance to doctrines, and for this reason, also, it insists that they shall be preached. Indeed, since doctrines make the duties, they *must* be preached in order that duties may be known. In the nature of the case, no one can know any more about his duties—their origin, their nature, their importance, their obligatory force—than he knows about the doctrines out of which they spring. It is the judgment of our denomination, therefore, that doctrines and duties ought always to be preached in closest connection—the doctrines as giving rise to the duties; the duties as springing out of the doctrines.

I wish to call your attention to some doctrines which we have always regarded as very important. Of course, we attach supreme importance to the great essential doctrines of religion—the doctrines of faith, and repentance, and love and consecration—which must be received, and exert their controlling influences, before any one can be saved. But, while we attach supreme importance to these essential doctrines, there are some other doctrines, somewhat peculiar to us as a denomination, to which we attach great importance; and some of these doctrines I wish now to present for your consideration:

1. I wish to say, as somewhat introductory to further remarks, that we hold the doctrine of the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures—the doctrine that from beginning to end, in their poetry as well as in their prose; in their historical parts as well as in their doctrinal and devotional parts—they are "the word of God," written by "holy men as they were moved by the Holy Ghost"; and so, in all respects, "an infallible rule of faith and practice"; a foundation on which we may rest all the weight of our immortal interests, without any fear that our hopes shall at last "go up as dust."

As to the New Testament Scriptures, that what they say about the Saviour, about His incarnation, teachings, works, life, death, resurrection and eternal kingdom—and on all other subjects is divinely true, we hold that, after as protracted and thorough investigation as, perhaps, has ever been

given to any subject, is as fully established as any other important fact in the history of the world; so fully established, indeed, that it is now simply absurd any longer to call it in question.

As to the divine origin of the Old Testament Scriptures, we have the testimony of our Saviour himself in a form which we hold is abundantly sufficient. When He came into the world the Old Testament was already in existence in the form in which we now have it, as the catalogue of its books, given by Josephus, the historian of the Jews, makes perfectly evident. And not only was it then in existence, but it claimed to be a revelation from the same God from whom He claimed to have come, and to teach what He taught men, what they were to believe concerning Him, and what duties He required of them. He was, therefore, obliged to take some position in regard to it. What position did he take? Did he receive it or reject it? Or, did He receive it in part and reject it in part? Did He receive a portion of it as inspired, and reject the remainder as uninspired? Did He receive the devotional and doctrinal parts as from God, and reject the historical and poetical parts as not from Him? Did He ever, on any occasion, in the slightest degree, find fault with it? He found fault with the Jews for the manner in which they interpreted it, but did He ever find fault with it itself? On the contrary, did He not always refer to it as being, in all its parts and in the highest sense, the word of God? Did He not always read it as the word of God; expound it as the word of God; appeal to it as the word of God; rely on it as the word of God, and enforce it as the word of God? Did He not, on all occasions, give it His unqualified endorsement as an infallible revelation from heaven? Did he ever, in the remotest way, even intimate that there was anything faulty or erroneous in any part of it? Every careful reader of the New Testament knows that He did not. We have, then, for the divine origin of the Old Testament Scriptures the distinct and oft-repeated and unqualified testimony of the Son of God himself, which surely ought to be abundant enough for all who believe in His divinity. It is said, indeed, that when He came into the world He so humbled himself; so emptied himself of the infinite attributes of His nature; so emptied himself, for instance, of knowledge, that He did not know much about the Old Testament Scriptures; did not know as much about their

origin and contents as some critics now do; that the Jews around him thought they were inspired, and, therefore, He thought so, too; that they said that they were a revelation from God; and, therefore, He made the same assertion; that His views were only the echo of the views of the age in which He lived. That is, although He was the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, God manifest in the flesh; although, as the great Prophet of the Church, He had given the Old Testament by inspired prophets, as He afterwards gave the New by inspired apostles, He did not then know what He had thus given; did not know what He had given through Moses, or whether He had given anything through him; did not know wether David had written the Psalms ascribed to him, or not; did not know whether the Book of Isaiah was written by one Isaiah or two, or three, or none! Although He was the truth; proclaimed himself to be the truth—the author of the truth; the embodiment of the truth, the great object of the truth, the teacher of the truth—He, nevertheless, did not know what the truth was; could not identify it; could not infallibly point it out to those whose Saviour He undertook to be, and who depended on His instructions to be made "wise unto salvation!" How near such views of the Saviour come to the awful verge of the sin of blasphemy against Him, I shall not pause to point out. It is enough to know that when He was here on the earth, and when, by innumerable and indisputable proofs, He demonstrated himself to be divine, He endorsed the Old Testament Scriptures as the Word of God so fully and so unqualifiedly that He declared "the Scripture cannot be broken," and "till heaven and earth pass, one jot or tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all shall be fulfilled."

2. We hold the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God. There was a time in the eternity past when nothing existed save God himself. No world revolved in space; no angel stood before the throne; no creature had yet proceeded forth from His forming hand. "In the beginning," however, He created the heavens and the earth, and all that they contained. He gave to all things their being, properties and powers, and placed them under those laws he ordained for their government. *He made them according to His will, to be under the control of His will, to do His will.* [Develop.] It is inconceivable that He would create and introduce into His govern-

ment any being that He would not afterwards be able perfectly to control. If a question be here raised in regard to sin—the sin of fallen angels, and the sin of fallen men—it is enough to say that there are two kinds of decrees accordin to which He governs the world. These are efficient decrees, so called, because He himself executes them through His own immediate agency, or through the irresistible operation of the laws of nature; and there are permissive decrees, so called because in accordance with them, He permits free agents to act under the promptings of their own spontaneity—even to sin against Him, if, in spite of all He does to prevent them, they choose to transgress His holy and just and good law. He makes the "wrath of man to praise Him"—that is, He makes the sins to which their enmity against himself prompts them, contribute to the accomplishment of His infinitely wise and benevolent purposes [crucifixion of Christ]; and "the remainder of wrath He restrains"—that is, other sins to which their enmity against Him would prompt them, but which He does not intend thus to overrule, He prevents them from committing. Thus He sovereignly rules over all men—over the righteous with their consent; over the wicked without their consent. "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him what doeth thou?" "He worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." He is "God over all blessed forever." "Of Him and through Him, and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen." To this doctrine we attach great importance, because it, and it alone, exalts God to that infinite height of majesty and authority and power which alone is worthy of His infinite excellence and glory, and because it reduces proud man to that subordinate place beneath His throne which alone He has any right to occupy; and thus the doctrine puts God and man in their right relations to each other; in those relations which reason insists they should hold toward each other. [Nothing arbitrary.] Many objections are made to the doctrine; but it is plain that they are without conclusive force, for it is impossible that the human race could be in a more desirable condition than when as now, according to this doctrine, it is sovereignly presided over by infinite wisdom and power and goodness and mercy.

3. While we hold the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty

of God, we, at the same time, hold just as fully and as firmly the doctrine of the free agency of man. We are conscious that we are free. We are conscious that in all our mental exercises and in all our moral acts, we are self-determined. We are conscious that our thoughts are our own; that our affections are our own; that our characters and lives are our own; that they are just what we voluntarily make them. Thus it is the clear and indisputable testimony of our own consciousness that we are free agents. The Scriptures bear the same testimony. They deal with us, in all respects, as free agents. They warn us as free agents; they threaten us as free agents; they invite us and appeal to us, and command us as free agents. They tell us that we shall be summoned to our final account at that day as free agents; and that as free agents our eternal destiny shall be fixed. On the conclusive testimony, then, of both consciousness and the word of God, we hold this doctrine just as tenaciously as we hold the doctrine of the divine sovereignty. We do not claim, indeed, that we are able to reconcile them; that we can, in all respects, show just how God can be absolutely sovereign, "foreordaining everything that comes to pass," and yet how man can at the same time be perfectly free, wholly self-determined in all his acts. But we see nothing in this inability to reconcile these doctrines that should prompt us to reject the one or the other. There are a number of facts in nature —demonstrated to be such—whose consistency one with another scientists cannot point out. Yet they rationally accept them [develop], each on its own independent and sufficient evidence. So we do here. Since both doctrines are proved to be true, we fully accept both. We do not imagine that nothing can be true in religion except what our feeble and sin-darkened faculties enable us to see is true. We would avoid the arrogance of supposing that the measure of our capacity to understand truth in religion is the measure of the possibility of truth in that infinite sphere.

4. We hold the doctrine of the eternal divine decrees. Against this doctrine, also, many objections are made, solely because, as I believe, it is not understood. We are supposed to mean by it something very mysterious; something very strange; something arbitrary; something of fearful import to at least a large portion of the human race; something that unalterably determines the eternal destiny of multitudes of

men, not only without regard to mercy, but even without regard to justice. [Enlarge.] This, however, is an utter misapprehension of the doctrine. When correctly stated, as we hold it, and as the Scriptures teach it, it is impossible that it should not be accepted by every intelligent mind. What, then, do we mean by the decrees of God? *We mean just what the Scriptures mean: those plans which God formed beforehand for the government of the universe, which He intended to bring into existence, and for the administration of its affairs.* Must He not have formed such plans? [Enlarge.] Does the intelligent architect undertake to build a great house without forming beforehand plans in regard to it, as to its cost, material, size, shape, uses? Does the intelligent business man ever enter upon any great secular enterprise without forming beforehand plans with regard to it, as to agents, methods and objects? Does any sensible man ever enter upon any important undertaking without forming in advance with regard to it the wisest plans of which he is capable? Can it be possible, then, that an infinitely wise and gracious God brought into existence such a universe as this, and peopled it with millions of immortal beings, capable of infinite exaltation in holiness, or of infinite degradation in sin—[susceptible of infinite happiness, &c.]—without forming in advance in regard to them plans infinitely worthy of himself as to the government to which he would subject them, and as to the ends for which He would employ them? [Enlarge.] Surely not. Well, those plans that He must have formed beforehand for the government of the universe and for the administration of its affairs, *are what our Church means, and what the Scriptures mean, by His decrees.* Can there be any rational objection to such a doctrine as this?

What the plans were which He thus formed beforehand, He has to some extent made known to us. What were His plans in regard to the material universe, He has made known to us in the natural laws by which it is governed and in results brought about. What were His plans in regard to man's secular interests, He has disclosed to us in the providence which He exercises over him, as in early and latter rains, &c. What were His plans in regard to man's moral interests is partially revealed in the moral government to which He has subjected him; in the rewards He bestows upon the virtuous, and in the judgments He inflicts upon the vicious. But can

it be possible that He had plans in regard to the material universe, and in regard to man's secular and moral interests, and yet had no plans in regard to his spiritual interests, that so completely transcend all others in importance? If He had any plans in regard to man at all, must He not have had plans about that which most concerned his welfare for time and for eternity? If He had any plans whatever worthy of the infinite attributes of His nature—[enlarge]—of His infinite wisdom and goodness, must not these plans have been of that kind? And if, in the beginning, He formed such plans as these in regard to man's spiritual interests, *must He not now be carrying them out? If they were infinitely wise and gracious, ought He not now to be carrying them out; to be carrying them out just as originally formed?* [Any objection?]

But the part of the decrees to which men most seriously object is the doctrine of election, and here, again, I can but believe, only because they have utterly erroneous views as to the meaning of the doctrine. What does it mean? Election means choice; God's choice of men to be citizens of His kingdom; to be children in His family; to be the subjects of His saving grace; to be the heirs of eternal life. Can it be possible that anyone objects that He chooses to bestow such blessings as these upon men? [Enlarge.] Can it be possible that anyone objects that He thus chooses to save men? How else can we be saved? Are we saved by the law or by the gospel? By works or by grace? By ourselves or by God? Everyone must admit that we are saved by God, and by God alone. But, if He saves us, must He not first choose to do it; and since this is the most important thing He ever does for any members of the human race, if anything had a place in His eternal plans in regard to them, must not this choice have had such a place? Do not Scripture so say? "Chosen in Him from beginning," &c. Is not this choice, then, necessarily eternal?

It is thought, however, that this doctrine *limits* the gospel; confines it to only a few; converts it into a kind of little sacred enclosure—a small part of the race within; the great mass shut out, and kept out, no matter how much some of them may desire to enter in. This, however, is an entirely erroneous view of the doctrine. It does not *limit* the gospel; *it makes it.* [Enlarge.] It constitutes the whole of the

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gospel that is to be preached to men; for, let me ask again, how are we to be saved? In order that we may be saved, there are a number of things that must be done that we cannot do for ourselves. Our sins must all be pardoned. We cannot do that for ourselves. Our natures must be changed. We cannot do that for ourselves. We must be delivered from the dreadful penalty of violated law, and be brought into God's kingdom, and adopted into God's family, and kept through faith unto salvation, and be presented at last faultless before the presence of His glory. None of these things can we do for ourselves. God must do them for us. *Therefore, only to the extent that He has the purpose to do these things for us, and others, is there any hope for the salvation of man!* The doctrine of election, then, *that expresses the extent of His purpose,* constitutes the whole of the gospel contained in His word. If men are left to themselves in this great matter; if they are left to the blindness of their own minds; to the hardness of their own hearts; to the deadness of their own consciences; to the perversity of their own wills; to the corruption of their own natures; to their profound indifference to their own spiritual interests and aversion to the high and sacred duties imposed upon them; if they are left to accomplish in themselves the great transformation necessary to make them meet for God's service and for God's eternal kingdom, then there is not only no probability, but there is not even the possibility, of the salvation of a single soul. In that case, there would be no use in putting forth any efforts for their salvation; no use in prosecuting any further these services in which we are now engaged. [Enlarge.] It is only because God assures us in His word that He does not intend thus to leave them to themselves, but that He intends, in connection with His Church's labors, to bring to bear upon them such divine influences as shall overcome their opposition to himself, and incline and enable them to accept His Son as their Saviour, and to perform the spiritual duties He imposes them, that there is any good reason for making the slightest effort in their behalf. It is plain, then, that this great doctrine does not limit the gospel, but constitutes the whole of the good news that is to be proclaimed to the world.

But now, what a kind of a gospel does it constitute? Not a little, narrow, restricted gospel, that holds out the hope of

eternal life for only a few, but a wide gospel; a great gospel; a wonderfully comprehensive and glorious gospel; a gospel that, in the long run of the centuries, is to save the vast majority of the human race. The evidence of this seems to be conclusive. When our Saviour entered on His great conflict with His adversary and ours, He did not intend that that conflict should so terminate that the vast majority of our race should remain in that adversary's possession. That would have looked to the universe too much like a defeat; nor did He intend that that conflict should so terminate that that adversary should be able to march off the field exhibiting as many trophies of his skill and power as He himself could display. That would have looked too much like like a drawn battle. But He intended that that conflict should terminate in a victory so complete, that if anything should remain in that adversary's hands, it should be clear to all His intelligent creatures that it remained there, not because He could not despoil him of it, but only because, for infinitely wise reasons, He had not chosen to do it.

I suppose, therefore, that when the grand consummation of all things shall be reached, while it will then be found, alas! that a vast number of the human race perished, it will, at the same time, be found that so many more were saved, that the lost will bear to the saved, as Samuel Davies once expressed it, "only about the proportion that the inmates of the prisons of our orderly Commonwealth bear to the law-abiding citizens." Look at some evidence of the truth of this encouraging proposition: It is the belief of all evangelical denominations that all infants dying in infancy are saved. But up to this time, in the history of the world. It is probable that about one-half of the human race has died in infancy; so that we begin this grand count with about one-half of the human race already saved; *and saved by election!* For how else could infants, born with depraved natures, be saved, except by the gracious and sovereign choice of God, renewing them, and sanctifying them, and thus fitting them for His kingdom? And here let me say that it seems to me that those who are so much opposed to this doctrine, ought at least half-way to love it, *because it—and it alone—makes provision for the salvation of their dear dead children!*

But now, to the half of the human race already saved in infancy, add the millions that up to this time have been

saved by faith in the Saviour; and, then, add to that, the millions more that will be saved in the same way before the millennium begins; and then remember that the millennium is to last for a thousand years [and that that may be only a definite number for an indefinite, as is so often the case in the Scriptures], and that during that long period of time the population of the world will be at its maximum; that where there are tens now there will be hundreds then; that where there are hundreds now there will be thousands then; that where there are thousands now there will be millions then; that the earth's surface will everywhere be crowded with its teeming inhabitants; and yet that all the kingdoms of this world shall then become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. Now, aggregate these tremendous sums, and I think it becomes apparent that we have good ground for anticipating the fulfillment of such grand expectations as cheered the heart of the saintly Davies. As proof, for instance, it is said that when, in that day, our Saviour "shall see of the travail of His soul, He shall be satisfied." That is, when the redeemed shall then be assembled before Him, rising tier upon tier; tier upon tier; thousands upon thousands; millions upon millions [enlarge]; "a multitude which no man can number"; and when He shall then see the fruit of His labors; the purchase of His blood, *He shall be satisfied;* satisfied, notwithstanding all the humiliation involved in His incarnation; satisfied, notwithstanding all the insults of which He was made the object; satisfied, notwithstanding the crown of thorns that was ruthlessly thrust down upon His bleeding brow, and the dreadful scourge by which His sacred person was so cruelly laccerated; satisfied, notwithstanding the rough nails that were driven through His quivering nerves and flesh; satisfied, notwithstanding His dying agonies and awful death; satisfied, notwithstanding His infinite love for sinners and His infinite desire that they should be saved! Thus shall He be satisfied. *But how many souls, suppose ye, will there be necessary thus perfectly and forever to satisfy him?* Much more might be said on this point; but it is now evident, I think, that, in the long run of the years, the vast majority of the human race will be redeemed by the sovereign and gracious interposition of our God. While, then, this doctrine of election constitutes the gospel, it does not constitute a little, circumscribed gospel, embracing only a few; but a gospel so great,

so wide, so comprehensive, that it takes in, and makes *certain*, the salvation of the great mass of our race. How strange that such a doctrine should be objected to! How can men be saved at all except by the Lord; and how can their salvation be made certain except by His *unalterable purpose* to bring such gracious influences to bear upon them as shall draw them away from sin, and dispose and constrain them to accept the redemption He has promised. Is it not plain, then, that to object to this doctrine is practically the same thing as to object to their salvation itself?

There is, however, a particular objection made to the doctrine that must be noticed, before it is dismissed. Many fear that it stands in the way of their salvation. They fear that, although they claim to enter into the kingdom, they may be excluded because not among those whom God eternally chose. A simple illustration will relieve them of all painful apprehension on this subject. Suppose that several hundred of you had violated the laws of this Commonwealth so flagrantly that you had been condemned to death, and that your lives were now at the mercy of its chief executive, and that he should issue a proclamation in regard to you, announcing that some of you he would pardon; but that others of you he would not pardon, keeping the names, however, of both classes a secret with himself; and then suppose that he should add to the proclamation, "Nevertheless, whosoever shall come to me at the Capitol of the State, I will pardon." Would any of you have any difficulty about going? Would you say, "I cannot be certain he will pardon me, if I go, because he has said some he will not pardon?" Why, you might take his proclamation along with you in your pocket, and when you reached his presence you might, if you chose, pull it out and read to him, "Nevertheless, whosoever comes to me at the Capitol of the State, I will pardon;" and he would be obliged to pardon you, or else forfeit his veracity before the whole Commonwealth. Well, this illustrates our case as we stand before God. He declares in the Scriptures that some He intends to save; others He does not intend to save. At the same time, however, he says, "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out." Where, then, is there any difficulty about going? We may, if we choose, when we go into our prayer-closets to invoke His saving mercy, open our Bibles at such passages as this, and put our finger on them, and

read them before Him; and there is no irreverence in saying that He stands pledged before the universe to accept our sincere petitions and to grant us His redeeming grace. This doctrine, then, does not put the obstruction of a pebble in any sinner's way as he approaches the kingdom. If the illustration itself be objected to; if it be said, suppose all sinners should go to Him, what, then, would become of His declaration, "Some I will not pardon?" The answer is, *that is God's difficulty. Let God take care of His own difficulties!* It is infinite presumption on our part to suppose that God cannot so take care of all the difficulties arising out of the declarations of His Word as not perfectly and forever to verify them all!

5. Another important doctrine that our Church* holds is that man has fallen from the high estate in which he was created by sinning against God, and so has become spiritually totally depraved. This doctrine, like the others, is very much opposed. Men have employed all their ingenuity to discredit it, because it is mortifying to their pride, and because it exposes them in great peril. Even human reason, however, can demonstrate its truth in a very simple way: When God made man, because He Himself was perfect, He must have made man perfect—perfect physically, intellectually and morally. But physical perfection implies the absence of all weakness and disease. Intellectual perfection implies the capacity to perceive and acquire all necessary truth. Moral perfection implies entire freedom from sin, and supreme devotion to truth and to duty. But while man must have been created in this state, it is evident to reason that he is not in this state now. So far from being physically perfect, his body is marked by many infirmities, and is subject to the assaults of many diseases, and even of death itself. So far from being intellectually perfect, his mind is sadly clouded by sin, and the acquisition of the most necessary truth is a somewhat arduous task and attended by liability to fatal mistake. So

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*The Duchess of Buckingham, after attending one of Lady Huntingdon's meetings (of Whitfield's followers), wrote to her: "It is monstrous to be told you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth. This is highly offensive and insulting; and I can but wonder that your ladyship should relish any sentiments so much at variance with rank and good breeding."

far from being morally perfect, he is himself conscious, when the evil principles of his nature have been aroused, and brought into contact with the holy principles of God's nature, that he is "enmity against Him, not subject to His law; neither, indeed, can be." But this total opposition to that which is infinitely good and holy cannot mean anything else but total depravity, and so the Scriptures teach. Man is "conceived in sin;" "born in iniquity," he is "by nature the child of wrath;" "he is dead in trespasses and in sins." We, therefore, teach and preach this solemn and alarming truth.

We do not mean by it, however, what many think we mean. We do not mean that every man is as bad as he can be. We know that that is not true. We do mean any man is as bad as he can be. We know that that is not true. We do not mean that all men are equally bad. We know that that is not true. Nor do we mean that reason is so blinded that it can no longer distinguish between truth and error; or that conscience is so perverted that it can no longer distinguish between right and wrong. On the contrary, one of the strongest arguments for man's total depravity by nature is drawn from the fact that, although both reason and conscience distinctly point out to him his duty in regard to his highest interests, he utterly disregards the dictates of the one, and wholly refuses to be governed by the judgments of the other! When men thus refuse, as to their own highest interests, to be controlled by their own reason and consciences, has not evil obtained over them a destructive dominion? We do not mean by this doctrine, then, that reason and conscience are so impaired that they no longer perform their sacred functions. Nor do we mean to discredit the virtues of many of the unconverted. We do not deny that they may, in many respects, be good parents; good neighbors; good citizens; good friends; and that they may have in their characters much that is desirable and admirable. Indeed, morality does not, primarily, have reference to our relations to God, but to our relations to one another. But a man may, in many respects, be very faithful to his obligations to his fellowmen; and yet wholly disregard his obligations to God; and so he may have a good deal of morality; but not a particle of religion. What, then, do we mean by total depravity? We mean that men are, by nature, totally destitute of true love to God and to His law, and to His service; that they are

thus totally destitute of true love to that which is infinitely holy and good. We mean, also, that by nature they are in love with sin, and completely under its dominion, preferring it to the holiness which God enjoins so decidedly that they cannot be prevailed on, even by the threatened retributions of eternity, to abandon it! If such total destitution of true love to that which is infinitely good and such supreme and obstinate attachment to that which is infinitely evil, does not prove total spiritual depravity, what would prove it? We, therefore, give this doctrine a place in our creed, and proclaim it from our pulpits, that men may see, *what under any other preaching it is impossible for them to see, what is their true state before God, and how much they need the salvation He has provided.*

6. As growing out of this doctrine we hold, further, the doctrine of human inability; the doctrine that man cannot rescue himself out of the lost and ruined condition into which his sin has brought him; that he cannot believe of himself; that he cannot repent of himself; that he cannot of himself even go to the Lord Jesus Christ.

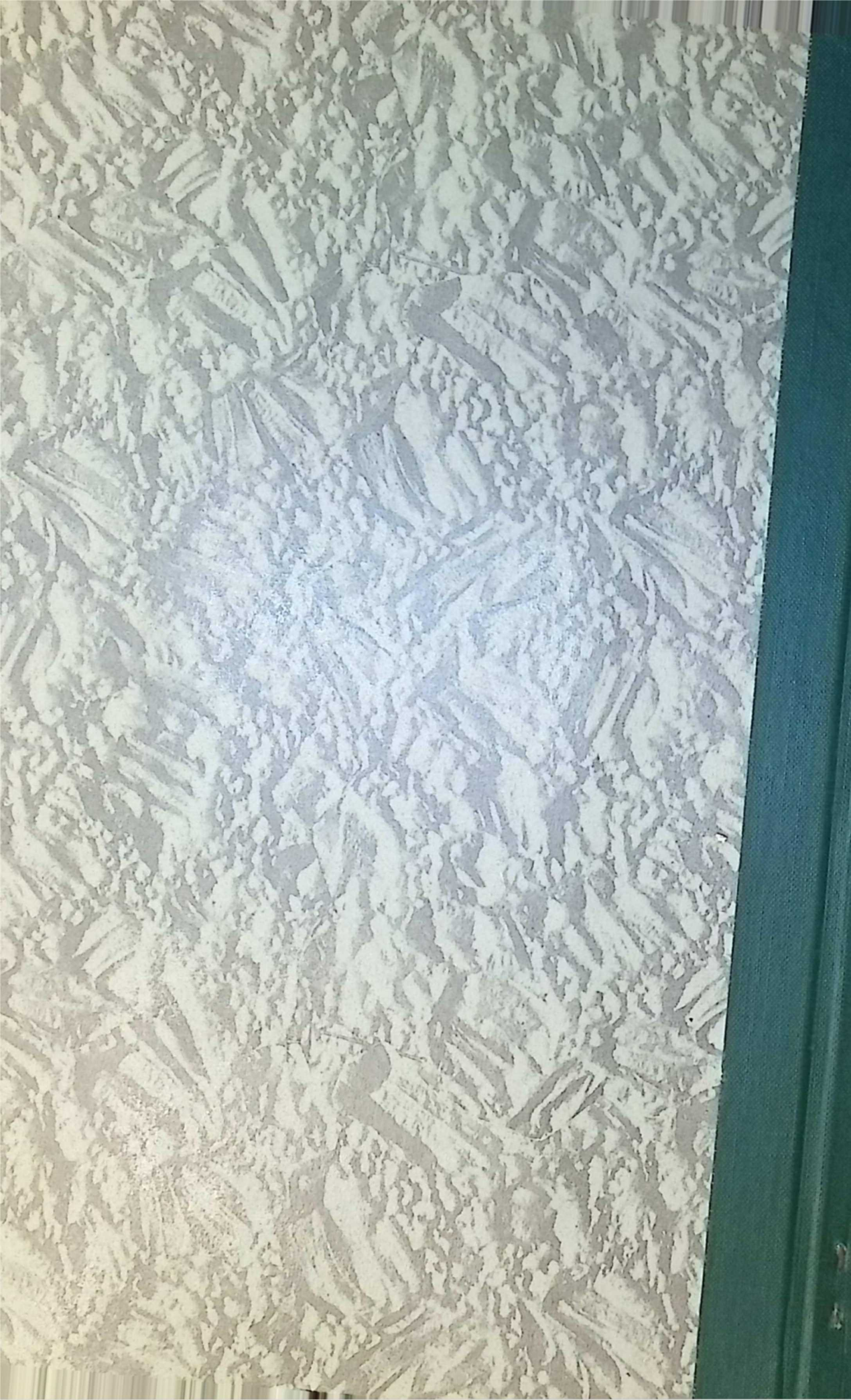
Here, again, we are assailed by bitter objections. It is said: "If men cannot perform these acts, why are they commanded to perform them? How can it be their duty to do what they have not the power to do?" The conclusive answer to this objection is found in the nature of the inability by which they are characterized. It is not a physical inability, such as would characterize them, if they were required to lift a thousand pounds, when they have strength to lift only two or three hundred. That kind of inability is excusable; nor is it an intellectual inability, such as would characterize them if they were required to solve some problem in science or philosophy that transcended all finite intelligence. That kind of inability, aso, is excusable. But the inability is moral in its nature. It is an inability of will. In other words, the only reason why the sinner cannot go to Christ is that he is too much averse to Him to go to Him. But what right has any man to be so much averse to such a Being as Christ is that he cannot get his consent to go to Him? What right has he to be so averse to such a holy and just and good law as that which He imposes, that he cannot get his consent to make it the supreme rule of his life? What right has he to be so averse to such a service as that to which Christ sum-

mons him, that he cannot get his consent to consecrate to it all he is and all he has? Surely no man will say that he has any excuse for such aversion as this. But if he has no excuse for this aversion, of course he has no excuse for the inability that it alone constitutes. The sinner's inability, then, since it consists in aversion to Christ, so far from excusing him, only adds to his condemnation.

This doctrine we not only hold, but consider it of the utmost importance to preach; for only when men are convinced that they cannot save themselves, will they accept of the offered interposition of the Saviour. Some of us remember how it was in our own experience. Becoming concerned about our spiritual interests, we tried, in our own strength, to repent and believe. We failed. Becoming more concerned, we tried more earnestly. But again we failed; and this was our experience, it may be, for days and weeks. At last we became so much concerned that we put forth the utmost efforts of which we were capable to believe and repent in our own strength. But again we failed as completely as ever before. Then, at last, conscious of our inability to perform those acts on which our salvation was suspended, we cried, "God help! God help!" *and then God did help*, as he always does, when we feel the need of His grace, and sincerely ask for it. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity;" and this doctrine should constantly and earnestly be preached that man may be brought into that extremity which furnishes God the opportunity to stretch forth His arm for his deliverance.

7. There is time to mention very briefly only one more doctrine of our Church, to which we attach great importance—the doctrine of justification by faith; or, what is the same thing, the doctrine of salvation by grace. Christ came into the world, and took our place under the law; obeyed its precepts for us, and suffered its penalty. When we receive Him as our Saviour by faith, the righteousness which He thus wrought out for us, is made over to us; is set down to our account; is made as truly ours as if we had obeyed the law and suffered its penalty for ourselves; and thus we have for our justification in God's sight a better righteousness than even the angels have, for they have only their own righteousness, which, because it is only their own, is a finite righteousness, while we have the righteousness of the Son of God Himself, which, because it is His, is an infinite righteousness;

a righteousness in which even the justice of God shall never be able to detect any deficiency. Accepted by God on the ground of this righteousness, we are introduced into His kingdom, and are kept by His power through faith unto salvation, for as the foresight of the sins we shall commit in the future does not constitute any reason in God's view why we should not be brought into this relation to Himself; so, of course, the subsequent actual occurrence of those sins will not constitute in His view any reason why we should be put out of it.

Such are some of the great doctrines of God's Word, for which we, as a denomination, have always stood, and for which we continue to stand at the present day as confidently and as resolutely as at any time in the past. They are doctrines which, as we now see, can be vindicated at the bar of sound reason as clearly as they can be established from the pages of divine revelation. Their efficiency for good is demonstrated by the indisputable testimony of history. Look back over the past, and see what churches they have made; what denominations in different parts of the world; what men and women; and, wherever they have been received, how they have purified and elevated and ennobled all the institutions of the world—the family, the Church, and the State!

What other system of doctrine can point to a history of equal achievements? Let us continue to hold them, and to inculcate them, and, because they are the doctrines of God's word, our Church shall go forward with the future under God's blessing, and shall gloriously do God's work.